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TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO MK GR

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: DAS DICARLO FOCUSES ON NATO REFORMS, NAME DISPUTE, AND KOSOVO IN MEETINGS WITH GOM LEADERS

REF: A. SKOPJE 815 (SJC)

¶B. SKOPJE 812 (IRAQ TROOPS)

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In meetings with government leaders in Skopje October 9-10, DAS DiCarlo told her interlocutors that time is running out for Macedonia to show more concrete progress on reforms required for NATO membership, including enhanced political dialogue, improved President-PM cohabitation, and implementation of the May 29 Agreement between governing VMRO and opposition ethnic Albanian DUI. She pressed for more confidence-building steps from Skopje to demonstrate goodwill to Athens on the name dispute, including renaming "Alexander the Great Airport." On Kosovo, she underscored the importance of US and EU unity on a status outcome, and reassured her interlocutors of continued USG support for the Ahtisaari plan's provisions on border demarcation.

¶2. (C) DAS DiCarlo's interlocutors agreed on the need for improved political consensus-building and dialogue, but President Crvenkovski was skeptical that PM Gruevski would return any goodwill shown on the President's part. Both PM Gruevski and FM Milososki highlighted progress Macedonia has made on several reform fronts, but acknowledged slow progress on implementation of the May 29 Agreement. All three agreed on the need for confidence-building steps with Athens and continued negotiations at the UN on the name, but they also underscored that changing Macedonia's constitutional name was non-negotiable and that there was no chance of reversing the decision to rename the airport. They reiterated the importance EU unity would have in paving the way for Macedonia to follow US and EU actions on recognition of an independent Kosovo; FM Milososki suggested the GOM could work with some skeptical EU countries to persuade them of the positive impact resolution of Kosovo's status would have on regional stability. End summary.

MEETINGS WITH GOM OFFICIALS OCTOBER 9-10

¶3. (U) EUR DAS DiCarlo, accompanied by Ambassador and P/E Chief (notetaker) met with President Crvenkovski, PM Gruevski, FM Milososki, and President of Parliament Georgievski during her October 9-10 visit to Skopje. She also met with the leaders of the two main opposition parties in Macedonia, SDSM and DUI (septel).

FOCUS ON NATO REFORMS

¶14. (SBU) DAS DiCarlo reminded her interlocutors that the USG supported Macedonia's NATO aspirations and recognized the important progress the country had made on the defense and other reforms required for membership. Time was short, however, and there was still much to do to convince skeptical Allies that Macedonia would be ready to receive an invitation at the 2008 NATO Summit. As priority tasks, the government needed to "do a U-turn" and work with the opposition to build a stronger consensus on needed reforms, communicate more effectively with the President, and show progress on implementation of the May 29 Agreement between VMRO and ethnic Albanian DUI.

¶15. (C) President Crvenkovski agreed on the need for broader political consensus on reforms, noting that he and the GOM had nearly closed a deal he had proposed on the composition of the State Judicial Council, or SJC (ref A). PM Gruevski at the last minute had maneuvered around the deal, however, to force a solution that lacked broader buy-in, alienating DUI in the process. On cohabitation, Crvenkovski said he would accept the GOM's recent proposed list of ambassadorial nominations (ref A), but was skeptical the GOM would reciprocate with flexibility on other priority matters.

¶16. (SBU) PM Gruevski recited a litany of government achievements over the year related to Macedonia's NATO bid, including an improved TI Corruption Perceptions Index rating, an increase in exports and FDI, tripling of the budget for equitable representation, passage of a religious freedom law, and the near completion of the composition of the SJC. He noted that VMRO was engaged in "regular" dialogue with DUI,

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but admitted there was still no agreement on the May 29 Agreement's provisions for a draft language law and compensation for the victims of the 2001 conflict.

¶17. (SBU) FM Milososki noted that the MFA was engaged in an outreach effort to other NATO allies to make the case for the country's membership prospects. He agreed that enhanced political consensus and dialogue were challenges the GOM had to overcome, and suggested the GOM would work with the opposition to eventually implement the Law on Police, a key NATO membership-related reform that would require DUI's cooperation.

¶18. (SBU) The Ambassador interjected that the way things were accomplished in Macedonia often was as important as what was actually achieved -- implementing the police law would require the cooperation of DUI-run municipalities, and the government, in bypassing DUI on the SJC, had created a tougher atmosphere for future attempts to work with that party. Milososki agreed on the need for improved communication between VMRO and DUI, suggesting that another meeting between PM Gruevski and DUI President Ahmeti might contribute to that goal.

CHANGING CONSTITUTIONAL NAME: "MISSION IMPOSSIBLE"

¶19. (C) In addition to carrying out NATO membership-related reform efforts, DAS DiCarlo said, the GOM also should avoid provocations related to the name dispute with Greece, and should show good faith efforts in the ongoing UN talks on the name issue. She suggested the GOM consider confidence-building steps it could undertake to demonstrate its goodwill toward Athens, including reversing the decision to rename Skopje Airport as "Alexander the Great Airport," which the Greeks had seen as a deliberate provocation.

¶10. (C) President Crvenkovski replied that it was clear Athens was trying to use NATO and EU leverage to extract a compromise solution from Macedonia. He also acknowledged the need for additional confidence-building steps, admitting that

the renaming of the airport as "Alexander the Great Airport" had been ill-timed. Crvenkovski said he understood the high-level USG messages he had received regarding the need to demonstrate sincerity in the ongoing name dispute negotiations under UN auspices. That would be hard to do, however, if the Greeks continued to demand that Macedonia change its constitutional name -- a "mission impossible."

¶11. (C) In a later tete-a-tete meeting, PM Gruevski was adamant that he could not reverse the decision to rename the Skopje airport. Separately, President of Parliament Georgievski noted that Greece insisted on exclusive rights to what the Macedonians believe is a "shared history." Such attitudes were out of place in the more "inclusive" 21st century, he said. FM Milososki said Skopje would continue to use the "power of argument" to counter Athens's employment of the "arguments of power" on the name, but in doing so would try to keep a "low profile" on the matter. Milososki added that he would welcome a meeting with the Greek Foreign Minister to discuss the name dispute.

KOSOVO -- THE NEED FOR EU UNITY

¶12. (C) DAS DiCarlo briefed her interlocutors on Kosovo developments. She underscored that the talks could not continue indefinitely, that the December 10 deadline was firm, and that if there was no agreement we thought the Ahtisaari plan remained the best way forward. Partition was "not on the table," she added, and the USG would also hold the Kosovars to their acceptance of the Ahtisaari plan's provisions on border demarcation.

¶13. (C) President Crvenkovski noted that the GOM kept saying publicly that Kosovo status would not endanger stability and security in Macedonia, but he acknowledged that any solution would carry with it some risk for the country. The government feared any attempt to divide Kosovo, but feared "even more a frozen status quo that would leave Kosovo status an open question." Crvenkovski was confident Macedonia could tackle any challenge from a Kosovo status outcome, provided inter-ethnic relations in the country remained stable. On recognition of a Kosovo UDI, Crvenkovski said Macedonia would

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want to follow the lead of Washington and the EU, if the latter could manage a united front.

¶14. (C) PM Gruevski echoed Crvenkovski's point on the need for a united EU position on Kosovo. He said the GOM's positive role on Kosovo status issues had soured relations between Skopje and Belgrade, but that Serbia eventually had come to understand, if not accept, Macedonia's position. Milososki echoed that theme, and said he hoped Belgrade's threat to retaliate against Skopje if the GOM recognized an independent Kosovo was "only rhetorical." He offered that Macedonian might be able to work with countries like Hungary and Slovakia to bring them closer to a hoped-for EU unified position by convincing them of the positive effect resolution of Kosovo's status would have on regional stability.

POSITIVELY CONSIDERING ADDITIONAL TROOPS FOR IRAQ

¶15. (C) Responding to DAS DiCarlo's praise of Macedonian troops serving in Iraq, President Crvenkovski said the GOM would soon complete its review of a USG request for an additional Macedonian platoon for those operations (ref B). He had asked to meet with the Prime Minister and his cabinet to discuss the request. The GOM would consider its financial capacity to fund the deployment, military capabilities, and the political sustainability of an increased mission. He expected to be able to give a positive reply within the next week.

¶16. (U) DAS DiCarlo cleared this cable.
MILOVANOVIC